Review

Akiko Hashimoto

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Trauma, Memory and Identity in Japan

Oxford University Press, New York, 2015, 192 pp.

The 20th century could easily bear the title of a century of war. It was a century which saw two World Wars, the Cold War between the United States and the USSR along with its numerous proxy wars that emerged as a consequence, as well as numerous other conflicts around the globe. The last century also bore witness to atrocities and abhorrent acts committed by human beings against other human beings the likes of which have hitherto never been seen. Tragedies such as the Holocaust, the Srebrenica massacre, the Rwandan genocide and numerous others have left a deep and lasting impact upon the individuals and families who were victimized by these events as well as entire societies whose structure was unravelled by antagonism and conflict. These horrid events deeply affected the international community as well, and it has been attempting to deal with such events and their consequences by means of various instruments, such as the establishment of international court tribunals, humanitarian and military interventions.

The sheer complexity of the aforementioned events which were endemic to the 20th century means that the memory of these events is deeply ingrained in the identity of individuals and societies who in some way witnessed or participated in

Identity in Japan attempts to provide a broad overview of the process of cultural reconstruction and the construction of identity by analysing individual and collective memory in a society where dealing with the idea of having been defeated and finding a solution to overcome the turbulent past was (and remains) an integral aspect of post-conflict recovery. Specializing in Japanese culture as well as comparative sociology, the author uses her knowledge of the two to inform the reader about the key facets of the Japanese postwar recovery and identity construction process. Also, Hashimoto compares this process and its characteristics to similar processes in other societies that faced the challenge of dealing with the notion of defeat and incorporating this notion into a coherent identity for future generations. The author thus often refers to Germany's problem of having been the defeated nation in World War II as well as being regarded as the perpetrator of the crimes of the Holocaust.

The author divides the book into five main parts. The first part gives a general overview of the significance of cultural memory in Japan as well as providing an analytical framework for the rest of the book. The second part deals with the intergenerational transmission of memory within families and how this transmission structures identity. The third part analyses commemorations of wartime events in Japan, as well as the portrayal of these events

in popular media and the impact of popular media on public opinion. The fourth, penultimate part offers an insight into Japan's educational system and the process of the institutional transmission of historical narratives and memory, while the final, fifth part serves to offer a view of the issues Japan faces today, as well as to take a step outside Japan's borders and compare the case of Japan to the case of Germany. The book as a whole attempts to convey the message that history and memory are, to a large extent, indistinguishable and that, consequently, the memory of historical events poses an important issue in the present, both in Japan and elsewhere. Lessons are to be drawn from past events and the way they have been dealt with beforehand in order for society to move forward.

The author begins by identifying two main questions which permeate the ever-contentious discussion regarding the memory of the past – why Japan fought an unwinnable war and why Japanese citizens had to both kill and be killed for what ultimately proved to be a lost cause. Hashimoto correctly notices the importance of these two questions in a defeated culture such as Japan – being defeated in a war necessarily breeds a feeling of futility within the population of a defeated country, which proves to be a high hurdle to overcome in trying to recover from traumatic events. The concept of cultural trauma is key to Japan's "history problem" and the author refers to Jeffrey Alexander's definition of the term, which describes a situation where members of a group or society are subjected to a traumatic event which irrevocably impacts collective identity and is ineffaceable in the sense that it structures discourse for future generations, becoming culturally relevant over and through time. Hashimoto realizes that cultures trying to overcome the suffering of the past will likely not create uniform explanations for past events. Rather, the struggle to make sense of the past will lead to conflicting narratives. In the case of Japan, the author recognizes three categories which differ in how they depict the actors who participated in the war. These actors can be regarded as heroes, victims or perpetrators, and each of these depictions provides for a specific lens through which the events of the Asia-Pacific war are seen. These three distinct narratives dominate public discourse in Japan, vying for dominance over each other. The author largely relies on content analysis to exemplify her theoretical postulations and theses, while also employing *shadow comparisons*, i.e. applying theoretical concepts created by other authors who researched and analysed cultural trauma and memory transmission in other societies. The book focuses on the time period between 1985 and 2015.

The second part of the book focuses on the impact the Asia-Pacific war had on soldiers who fought in it and how the trauma of going through the war consequently affected their families. The author surveys 430 different recounts offered by soldiers, their children and grandchildren, as well as women who survived the war, to give the reader an overview of the process of the transgenerational transmission of cultural trauma. The author recognizes that individuals most often have strong ties to their families, and seeing as memories pertaining to the family hold great emotional importance, this also applies to memories related to cultural trauma. This is why various discourses and narratives about past events are reproduced by people who

never directly experienced these events, but rather inherited certain memories, and with them a framework for understanding the past. Through her content analysis of the aforementioned recounts, the author explores the process of biographical repair – an intergenerational process of arranging traumatic memories and experiences into a coherent and stable mental construct that becomes part of a family's identity across generations. The author finds that memories of desperation and suffering dominate soldiers' recounts, and although a number of them acknowledge their complicity in crimes and atrocities committed during the war, they largely tend to see themselves as victims of circumstance who suffered because of their government's failures and mistakes. When it comes to the postwar generation, the author finds they are faced with a difficult conundrum – they harbour a desire to learn the facts about their family's history, but on the other hand they also wish to preserve an untarnished memory of their elders, which may easily be endangered by the facts and might point to their fathers or grandfathers as perpetrators rather than victims or heroes. The stories of these individuals also focus on the idea of powerlessness and victimization. They tend to regard their elders as having been victimized by their participation in the war, and many speak of themselves as victims as well. Numerous accounts tell stories of broken families and severed family ties as a consequence of the war. Consequently, members of the Japanese postwar generation, as well as the youth of today, are often stern believers in pacifism and the idea that Japan should never again go to war. The author thus finds that the quest to construct a coherent family biography which members of younger generations face, leads to a general feeling of resentment not only towards the Asia-Pacific war in specific, but to the very idea of war as well.

The author devotes the third part of the book to analysing the importance of commemorating wartime events as well as depictions of these events and their significance in popular media. Japan's annual commemoration which takes place on 15 August (the date of Japan's official surrender in the Asia-Pacific war is 15 August 1945) is at the centre of this chapter. Hashimoto explains how the traditional commemoration contributes to the continuity of memory by emphasising the importance of remembering past events and the impact they had and continue to have. However, despite the fact that 15 August is of extreme importance to almost all citizens of Japan, different individuals and groups assign different meanings to the date, depending on which narratives they have decided to opt into. Hashimoto's typology of narratives which separates them into narratives of heroes, of victims and of perpetrators comes into play again at this point, as it does throughout the book, thus providing the reader with a coherent frame of reference for understanding the content presented in the book. To illustrate how different historical narratives are embraced by the highest echelons of political power, the controversial Yasukuni shrine which is dedicated to all who died serving the Empire of Japan is also mentioned. The "Yasukuni problem" of whether or not the shrine should be visited and which kind of statements should be issued by political representatives visiting it is quite contentious given the fact

that the shrine honours, among others, a number of individuals who are considered Class A war criminals. The author notes how the government's stance towards visiting the shrine has changed over the years – for example, prime minister Shinzo Abe focused on honouring the heroism of fallen soldiers rather than expressing remorse for what happened in the war, which was common of previous prime ministers. By offering such examples, the author clearly illustrates how official statements and stances are as prone to change as public opinion. When it comes to public opinion, this chapter of the book demonstrates the importance of commemorative editorials in newspapers such as *Asahi* and *Mainichi*, as well as the importance of films and television programmes in creating awareness of war memory. Through thorough elaboration of various examples, the author shows the significance that popular media has had in keeping discourse about wartime events and related issues, such as perpetrator guilt and stigma associated with the war, alive in recent times.

In the fourth part of the book, Hashimoto explores how World War II is taught to children and what type of narrative is institutionally transmitted to children via education. The author analyses a total of 46 social studies texts within her discourse analysis. The Japanese educational system, as the author explains, inculcates in children an awareness of the suffering that transpired in the past in order to encourage negative emotions towards war. Peace education is an important part of teaching the wartime past to children, and it happens outside the classroom as well. Excursions and school trips to peace museums also help to create an anti-war atmosphere among the younger generation. The author notes that teaching history to children is an integral part of shaping a national legacy and identity. Consequently, the content of history and civics textbooks, as well as the meaning they assign to certain events, has been prone to changes with the country's political currents. However, on a general level, Japanese history and civics textbooks portray the war, as well as the build-up that led to it, as a turbulent time characterized by numerous mistakes made by the government which led to the suffering of an enormous number of people. This type of narrative encourages negative sentiments towards war and also serves to warn future generations of what must never again come to pass, regardless of *why* it has come to pass. Hashimoto also discusses the importance of manga (comic art), given that 40% of all books and magazines in Japan are manga. Manga allows readers to see history from the perspective of ordinary people who lived through certain events which makes it extremely accessible to children and young people who tend to sympathize with characters they see in manga. Again, the author finds that pacifist sentiments are largely encouraged in manga. On a general level, the author concludes that Japanese children are raised in an atmosphere which for the most part is pacifist and anti-war. Antipathy towards war and military force has been consistent among younger people as a consequence, and narratives of heroes have been largely absent from official education. The author also notes, however, that the dominant anti-war narrative in education is often not based on critical reflection which may harm the quest to fully understand the significance of war and peace in Japan's history.

In the final part of the book, the author offers a consideration of how Japan deals with the contentious question of developing a military capable of waging war and compares the case of Japan to other countries. The author claims that there are different approaches to the issue of whether or not Japan should develop military force. The three distinct approaches recognizable in public discourse are nationalism, pacifism and reconciliationism, and they each correspond to one of the memory narratives the author draws on throughout the book – heroes, victims and perpetrators, respectively. These three approaches vie for dominance in Japan's public space and political arena. The case of Japan is compared to the case of Germany. The author explains how Germany's process of reconciliation involved an admission of guilt which allowed Germany to construct a new identity in direct contrast to the tragic past. Japan should, the author believes, try to undertake a similar process of constructing a collective identity. However, several cultural and historical differences between Germany and Japan mandate that this process cannot be completely analogous to the one that took place in Germany. The author concludes that Japan will have to take the initiative in trying to complete its process of moral recovery in order to adapt to current geopolitical conditions.

In conclusion, the author provides a very clear and coherent narrative throughout the book. The analytical framework presented at the beginning is easily understandable and the numerous examples presented in the book serve to keep the reader engaged. Reading the book requires some prior knowledge about historical events, but this in no way harms its accessibility to most readers. The sociological and psychological concepts the author uses are clearly explained which makes this book useful not only for exploring the specific case of Japan, but also for gaining general knowledge about the study of cultural trauma, and the vocabulary and conceptual instruments necessary to understand the issue. Also, the author's claims related to a variety of issues are well backed up by facts and data, and the author's use of theoretical concepts developed by other authors as well as her use of comparisons to other cases make this book a very well rounded work. This book is highly recommendable for students of social sciences and the humanities, as well as for anyone with a general interest in either Japanese history (given the fact that numerous important events such as the Tokyo War Trials and landmarks such as the Yasukuni war shrine are discussed) or cultural trauma and the construction of collective identity in general, or both.

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